

Tuesday, September 18, 2012

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico's Third District applauded the announcement today that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is beginning clean up at three uranium mines on the Navajo Nation. The work, which is part of the EPA's five year plan to address uranium contamination on the Navajo Nation, will include clean up near Church Rock and Casamero Lake in New Mexico and Cove, Arizona.

"The legacy of uranium mining continues to be felt across New Mexico to this day," Congressman Luján said. "Cleaning up this land and ensuring the health and safety of these communities is a vital responsibility that I am pleased the EPA is addressing. This effort to cleanup these mines must be the beginning of a larger process that restores the land and addresses the scars that uranium mining has left on so many communities across the Navajo Nation."

North of Church Rock, EPA will oversee work by General Electric/United Nuclear Corporation and Rio Algom Mining to clean up soils and a road located near the Northeast Church Rock Mine, the largest underground uranium mine in the U.S, and the Quivira mine which is located approximately 1/4 mile to the northeast. The UNC mine was operated from 1967 to 1984 and produced approximately 9.8 million pounds of uranium. The Quivira Mine was operated between 1976 and 1985 and produced 3.1 million pounds of uranium. This fall's \$4 million dollar work at the two areas near the Northeast Church Rock and Quivira mines precedes a larger \$44 million cleanup of the Northeast Church Rock Mine expected to begin in 2016, contingent upon federal agency approvals.

Near Casamero Lake, EPA will clean up contaminated soil left by the Section 32 Mine. That cleanup will cost an estimated \$1.65 million and will include consolidating scattered contaminated soils on the main mine waste pile. Once that process is completed, the contaminated soils will be secured using a soil sealant, or temporary clean soil cover. The site will also be fenced until a final disposal decision is reached.

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